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Twenty destinations for 2014: Kashmir, India

Since the Foreign Office warning was partially lifted a little more than a year ago, Kashmir is once again on the radar of British travellers – and with good reason



This mountainous area is so beautiful it has been called "the Switzerland of Asia" Photo: AP

By Lisa Grainger
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Why? At the end of the last century, Kashmir was totally off-limits to British tourists. Bordering Pakistan, the north Indian valley was the site of regular uprisings against Delhi rule and a spate of kidnappings. However, since the British Foreign Office relaxed its warnings in November 2012 for visits to Jammu and Srinagar, more than 20,000 western visitors have joined the million Indians a year returning to a mountainous area so beautiful it has been called "Terrestrial Paradise", "Venice of the East" and "the Switzerland of Asia".

Srinagar has long been popular with holidaymakers. In the 16th and 17th centuries, the Mughals' elephant-borne harems would arrive from Delhi to enjoy the mountain air and the terraced gardens surrounding Nagin Lake. Then in the mid-19th century, the Brits descended, constructing deodar-wood houseboats from which to take in the sights of shikara boats paddling by, fisher-women in bright saris, vegetable gardens floating on beds of lotus root.

It is from these cool floating b&bs – or the new Vivanta by Taj hotel, with its hilltop views – that most visitors base themselves to explore the historic town: the almost Tudoresque architecture, with its tiny bricks and dark beams; the grand Mazar-i-Salateen tombs; the intricately carved 15th and the colourful local market, with its tempting cashmere pashminas and hand-painted papier-mache goods. The hill-town of

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Gulmarg has not yet been given the green light by the Foreign Office, but is a tempting place in which to walk in pine forests in summer, to ski in winter, and to trot along mountain paths on horses festooned in bright ribbons, before a hearty lunch of curry and lassi.

How to go: Greaves India (020 7487 9111, greavesindia.co.uk) can organize a 10-day trip to Delhi, Srinagar and Gulmarg from £2,399 per person, including centuries, the Mughals' elephant-borne harems - century Shah Hamdam mosque; flights, transfers and guides.

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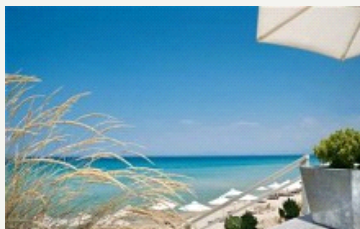
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